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A. S E R A F I M O V I C H

# SAND

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# СЕРАФИМОВИЧ

ПЕСКИ  
И ДРУГИЕ  
РАССКАЗЫ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ  
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ  
МОСКВА





# **P**ERAFIMOVICH

**S A N D  
AND OTHER  
STORIES**

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
MOSCOW

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY G E O R G E H. H A N N A

ILLUSTRATED AND DESIGNED BY M. K L Y A C H K O

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THE CART was tossed from side to side by the ruts and the twisted roots that crawled across the road even when the bay mare, with her rubbed withers, sore back and constantly nodding head, moved only at a walk.

The forest had been cut down on both sides of the road. Either the work had been badly done or the cattle had chewed off the tops of the young trees, preventing their growth; whatever the reason there was nothing as far as the eye could see but blackened, split, mossy stumps, miserably overgrown with stunted bushes.

Chattering magpies made bright patches as they flashed past under a low, grey sky.

With fingers that peeped out of her torn gloves, Galina held on tightly to the shaking cart rail, pulled her tongue back in her mouth, clenched her teeth and gasped in her torment, so painfully was she being jolted up and down.

White-headed Mikhailo, in a torn winter cap with ear flaps, swung his bast-shoes over the front of the cart

where the mare kept banging them with her manure-bespattered legs. He was also being shaken up—his cap kept dancing jerkily above the serrated edge of the distant blue forest, but the shaking was a thing in itself and it did not concern him, he was thinking his own thoughts, or perhaps he was not thinking at all but was just looking idly at the trace rope that had caught the mare's tail and was pulling it aside—he would have to put it straight.

The fields they had passed, the tree-stumps and the peasant lad who was driving her from the station—all this she had imagined before, she had seen glimpses of it in books she had read and there were memories of villages in which she had sometimes spent the summer. Perhaps she had not read all there was in the books and had not noticed everything from the train windows on her way to summer teaching work, or perhaps it had been different on those estates where she had taught—in any case, everything here had a different look about it, silent, lonely and pensive.

As they were driving through a field spread with dung a village loomed dark ahead. On the outskirts there was a big building, black with age, with a new, green-painted roof and a group of young birch trees in its little front garden that looked like bridesmaids.

"Who's your passenger?" asked a tall, old man with a grey beard tumbling over his linen shirt. He spoke in a husky, deep sort of voice, like that of a ventriloquist, and placed a hand on the rail of the cart, a pale wary hand scored with the veins of old age.

Mikhailo tugged at the reins and kept turning round.

"I took the priest's luggage to the station. Rye is ten kopeks dearer this year. At the level crossing the mare over-reached herself, she'll be killing herself next," he said.

He spat through his teeth under the mare's tail.

"On the way back I brought the teacher," he added.

"Huh," muttered the old man nodding towards the dark building, "that's the school over there, God bless Kabanov for putting a good roof on it. . . . You know, Mikhailo, I went to see my son: wondered whether he'd want me or not. He told me to go back where I'd come from."

"That's how they all are now: the old people have one foot in the grave so what's the use of feeding them."

Mikhailo used his whip handle to adjust the trace that had caught under the mare's tail and then began scraping the dried manure off the horse's legs with the end of it.

"I'm going to the steward this week, I want to rent the Wet Corner."

"That's over by the forest, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh: there won't be more than an acre there, however you try to stretch it but they ask a big enough price."

"Thieves, by Christ. . . ."

"Blood-suckers."

"They're talking as though I were just a bit of luggage or weren't here at all."

Galina was glad that the terrible shaking had stopped but she still held on to the rail as she sat there.

The deeply-rutted, single village street was loneliness itself. In the middle of a dark wet patch stood the village well and around it a flock of motionless white geese; from behind the cottages the cupolas of the church peeped out.

And now, as she had done all the way from the station, Galina surrendered herself to some sort of uniformly oppressive, never before experienced, order of things that formed part of the silence, the loneliness and some all-pervading unsolved problem, and sat there waiting, saying nothing to her driver.

"Well, there you are," said Mikhailo as he touched up the mare, "I've just bought myself a new cap."

"Well, well," said the old man, removing his hand from the cart rail, "good-bye and good luck. That's the school, over there."

They drove up to the school.

Mikhailo jumped down.

"Hi, One-Eye, d'you hear me, I've brought the teacher, d'you hear?"

He knocked on the window-sill with his whip handle.

The school with its open windows had a deserted look about it. She could see the desks worn smooth with long usage and the bare walls.

Somewhere from the empty depths came a cough, followed by heavy, shuffling steps. The geese cackled around the well.

A round-shouldered old man, who looked like a hunch-back, came out on to the porch. He had a wall eye and a heavy square chin covered in grey stubble. With his one eye he glanced at the new arrival, walked heavily down the creaking steps, pulled a basket, bundle and bag out of the cart and silently carried them into the school, his elbows sticking out, and looking more round-shouldered than ever.

Mikhailo was adjusting his horse's collar.

Galina remained seated in the cart, afraid to stand up, her legs were so numb; suddenly she felt lonely and abandoned, of no use to anybody.

"Oh, Lord," thought Galina, "it's like living in a forest!..."

Then she remembered the gloomy expanses of tree-stumps.

"Why, there's not even any forest!..."

She suddenly overcame her weariness, jumped to the ground and went into the school.

It all looked forbidding: the big classroom, the smoke-blackened ceiling, the grimy desks, the blackboard with a big crack in it and behind it a fly-spotted map of the hemispheres on which the elongated shape of America gave an impression of something extremely dull.

Galina went to her narrow, high-ceilinged room. From the window she saw the same single street, the white geese around the well and the church behind the row of dark cottages.

She sat down on her roped basket in the middle of the room, her elbows on her knees and her chin resting on her hands.

She had been so reluctant to leave the town, to part from her friends, from the young people with whom she had grown up during her years at school, to leave the theatres and books and those of her friends who had gone on to college.

Never had she dreamed that one day she would have to bother with these ragamuffins, wearily hammering the ABC into their heads. How could she teach them anything when she had neither the skill, the experience nor the desire?

A voice that was at once familiar and unfamiliar sounded strangely in that empty room.

"But you have to live!"

It was her own voice, echoing hollowly.

With an abrupt movement she got up, wiped a cobweb off her face and began tugging at a knot in the rope as hard as a stone.

Shuffling and stamping with his heavy boots the humpless hunchback edged his way into the room dragging a white deal table. He stood it by the window, moved it about until its legs stood firmly on the floor; then he stepped to one side, looked with his one eye at Galina struggling with the tight knot, pushed her out of the way,

and, still without saying a word, began unravelling the knot with his teeth, nodding his head as he did so. There was, indeed, nothing to talk about, everything was familiar, there was already an atmosphere of dullness that stretched away down the long dark row of months, perhaps years, of lonesome monotonous life.

Galina began enthusiastically putting her room in order. Trying them first to see where they looked better she tacked postcards and photographs on the wall, arranged her books on the table and laid out on tiny shelves the knick-knacks she treasured as a memory of her former life.

The hunchback came in again, carrying a little, verdigris-covered samovar that was boiling furiously, snorting and bubbling and spouting clouds of steam; without a word he placed it on the table. Through the window she could see cattle passing by, raising a cloud of dust as they went.

Galina looked up in astonishment, not having asked for the samovar.

"Are you the caretaker?"

"That's it," he answered morosely.

"What's your name?"

"Vasily."

The room suddenly took on a cosy and friendly air.

The first days were filled with the business of getting settled—she had to make arrangements to get her dinners and buy a stock of food.

Towards evening on the day she arrived Galina went to visit the village priest.

Some of the women she met bowed to her—they knew already that she was a teacher—others just passed her and then turned round to look at her; it was the same with the men: some raised their hats, others did not acknowledge her; the young girls did not raise their eyes but when she had gone by stopped and looked back at her.

The new church stood on a slight rise, its newly-painted cupolas staring up at the sky.

The priest's house was built in its own enclosure behind the row of cottages. Beside the house there were a garden, sheds and stables; near one of the stables lay a heap of manure, out of which stuck a shaggy head with a black beard.

In front of the manure heap stood another black-bearded man, the priest himself, a tall man in a cassock, his braided hair hanging down his back; he was proclaiming in a magnificent baritone that disturbed the hens pecking at the manure so that they, too, started their own conversation.

"What do you think you're doing here? Did I get this manure ready for you? What right have you to dispose of other people's property? Sitting there as though you were in your own house! Why, it's worse than stealing—like a thief in the night. There is nothing worse than a thief and God punishes thieves. You can be taken to court for your wilfulness and what is more, it is condemned by God..."

"Father," said the head in a deep bass voice, turning its black beard towards the priest, "Father, I have sinned. I have sinned and my soul is dark. I have every respect for you, Father ... from the bottom of my heart ... but the pains were so bad I could neither sit nor stand. ... The only thing to do was to take a manure bath and as you know with my one horse there's not enough manure. And so I thought that it would be no loss to you and would do me good..."

"How dare you, without asking!..."

The head moved, the neck stretched out, the manure rolled aside and there appeared deep red shoulders, arms and at last the entire naked body of a man, as ruddy as if it had just come out of a steam-bath. Folding his gnarled hands he bowed his head and said humbly:



"I'm sorry, Father.... Give me your blessing."

Galina ran into the house.

The house smelled of freshly scrubbed floors and little children, with just a faint suggestion of incense.

There were muslin curtains in the little drawing room, flowers on the window-sills, photographs and pictures on the wall and a guitar hanging over the sofa. On a round table covered with a crochet-work cloth stood a silent gramophone with a battered horn; the shouts and laughter of playing children came from the adjoining room.

The priest's wife, corpulent after her eighth child, white-skinned and with beautiful black eyes, gave her a hearty and tender welcome.

"Come in, we're so glad you've come. We're always glad to see new people. Father will be here in a minute. It's dull here. And you're so young, Galina. You won't mind if I call you that, will you? After all, I'm an old woman compared to you. You have everything before you. Lidochka, go and call Daddy. That's my eldest, likes embroidering."

Big, deep blue enquiring eyes, unlike those of a child, looked up at Galina and she saw sadness in them as in the whole of that thin, wan face. The mother kissed her fondly on the head and the girl left the room, limping on one leg, a little braid of fair hair in which her mother had lovingly plaited a pink ribbon, dangling down her back.

"She has tuberculosis of the bones... in the knee... such a misfortune. Father Dmitry will come in a minute. He's all worked up, now. That man sitting in the manure out there—only don't you tell anybody else, Galina," she lowered her voice at this point, "we trusted him, a God-fearing man who respected the priest.... Aniska, take the baby out of the cradle, can't you hear him crying?... We trusted him so.... Whenever he came we always gave him tea and on holidays Father Dmitry would offer him a glass.... Is that child wet? All right, then, change